

# INQUIRY

## Topic: THE CIA



By Eileen Blass, USA TODAY  
William Webster

**William Webster, 64,** was appointed director of the Central Intelligence Agency by President Reagan in March 1987 and re-appointed last month by President-elect Bush. Webster had been director of the FBI for nine years and was a federal judge for seven years prior to that. Webster was interviewed by members of USA TODAY's editorial board and news staff.

## Soviets hint they'll help fight terrorism

**USA TODAY:** What chance is there of the CIA tracking down the terrorists who blew up Pan Am Flight 103, killing all 259 people aboard?

**WEBSTER:** Thanks to the new counterterrorism center and to good cooperation around the world with other intelligence services, and to a lot of other involvement, including the FBI, our chances are good. But I can't tell you when or how soon.

**USA TODAY:** So the investigation is going well?

**WEBSTER:** The leads are very encouraging. We've come a long way in understanding what caused the crash. We understand the nature of the [explosive] device, and we already have a good reading on those organizations that were capable of acquiring — I don't want to say manufacturing — such a device and getting it through the security gates that are in place to protect international traveling. There's a real determination to stay with this.

**USA TODAY:** If Soviet intelligence agents were to get a tip about who did this, would they share it with you?

**WEBSTER:** I would guess they would. It's a view that I have held that conflicts with many who have thought that the Soviet Union was monolith-

ically responsible for most of the terrorism around the world, particularly a decade ago. To whatever extent their involvement in training and supplying and shielding terrorists a decade ago may have been true, there have been a number of things that have happened in the world to change that.

**USA TODAY:** Such as?

**WEBSTER:** Mikhail Gorbachev's increased interest in having the Soviets play a significant foreign policy role as leaders in the world works against their sheltering, or encouraging, or harboring terrorists. We've had intimations of a desire of the Soviets to work in the world arena to reduce the threat of terrorism.

**USA TODAY:** There's been a lot of criticism about the refusal to declassify information for the Oliver North trial. Is there a cover-up going on?

**WEBSTER:** This whole question was handled in a highly professional manner. There's been enormous amounts of discovery of classified documents. We collected something like 600,000 or 700,000 pages of information — about 120,000 pages of that were classified — that we delivered in redacted form to the prosecutor and satisfied the prosecutor as to what

he needed, and held back from the prosecutor those things that we thought imperiled sources and methods that we could not afford to divulge.

**USA TODAY:** What would have been endangered by handing over the documents?

**WEBSTER:** I want to be very careful about that, but they involved identification of live sources. They involved revealing our capabilities — in other words our methods — in certain sensitive areas, to collect intelligence. They involved activities that were not at all tied to Iran-contra but might have been involved in defendant North's thinking about his authority and other things of that kind. They involved other countries and our relations with other countries that would be highly prejudicial to our relationships abroad.

**USA TODAY:** What circumstances helped create the Iran-contra affair?

**WEBSTER:** It started when people at the White House became impatient with the efforts of the intelligence services and others to locate the hostages, and then began to try to form sort of think-tank groups to see if they could come up with new and more imaginative ways of dealing with it. And as they started to do this, these think tanks became operational, and North was an operative person on it. It is fair to say that the National Security Council should not have become operational, did not have the discipline, the training, the supervision.

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The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_  
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The Chicago Tribune \_\_\_\_\_

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**USA TODAY:** What would prevent this from happening again?

**WEBSTER:** In the FBI, the training was such that every time a request like that came through, they checked with headquarters. There was a similar rule in the CIA that you do not accept assignments from the White House without senior approval. The way to stop that is to make it very clear that the National Security Council is to collect options for the president, not to do this kind of stuff.

**USA TODAY:** Is there any hard evidence to support administration charges that Libya is manufacturing chemical weapons?

**WEBSTER:** I'm not at liberty to describe the evidence in detail, because some of it involves our methods as well as our sources. I have seen the evidence. I've talked to all the analysts, and there just cannot be any reasonable doubt from those who have had access to this classified information that what Secretary of State George Shultz said is correct. We have also had corroborating information from other countries who have been watching the same activity.

**USA TODAY:** So you're satisfied that the plant is not producing pharmaceuticals as Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi has said?

**WEBSTER:** I don't want to be facetious, but aside from all that we know about the whole history of the development of that particular plant, and how

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the chemicals are put into missiles, it really makes one wonder what explanation Gadhafi has for taking a pharmaceutical plant, which was described as a desalinization plant 35 miles from the sea, and ringing it with anti-aircraft weapons. You have to wonder what kind of headache powder they're really making over there requiring all that protection.

**USA TODAY:** Are you continuing to find many Soviets defecting to the USA and bringing with them valuable information?

**WEBSTER:** We have had defectors, and they have been useful. Dealing with defectors continues to be a major challenge. First, you have the personalities of the people who defect. That's a major move. Imagine yourself deciding to do that. When they come over here, some of their expectations are reasonable; some are not. Some things don't go right. Freedom is one of the big problems for defectors. They don't know how to deal with all those decisions.

**USA TODAY:** Some defectors say the Gorbachev experiment may be noble but will fail in the end. What's your assessment?

**WEBSTER:** There's been an awful lot of predicting whether it's going to fail or not. It's easy to say it's going to fail, because there are so many obstacles that he has to overcome. But it would be a great mistake if we just declared him lost. He's an extraordinary leader. He's demonstrated cleverness and

boldness, and he has moved aggressively to obtain the sinews of power, to reorganize the Soviet government so that he will not be blocked by bureaucracy. He has opened up with *glasnost*, he has kept us at times off balance by his surprise foreign policy initiatives. We're always reacting to him, and that all works in his favor.

**USA TODAY:** Do you read any spy fiction, such as novels by John LeCarre or Charles McCarry?

**WEBSTER:** I read it sporadically. I'm not a buff, and sometimes that's a disadvantage. When the Reagan administration came here, we'd all read *The Spike* by Arnaud De Borchgrave and Robert Moss, and it was assumed that the American press was fully penetrated by the KGB. I do like Tom Clancy. There's a guy who says he's never seen a classified document, but he sure knows a lot.

**USA TODAY:** Could you make a bald statement that the CIA will not recruit and use journalists anywhere in the world?

**WEBSTER:** We'll not recruit newspaper people — American newspaper people. But we will accept information from journalists who think we should know something. We don't seek to interview journalists. But if a journalist calls us up and wants to tell us something, we'll take the information.